



Colorectal Cancer: What You Should Know

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the US. If everyone 50 or older had regular screening tests, at least 1/3 of deaths from this cancer could be avoided.

Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or rectum. The colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway connecting the colon to the anus. Colorectal cancer occurs most often in people age 50 and older. The risk increases with age. Both men and women can get colorectal cancer.

Are You at Risk?

Your risk for colorectal cancer may be higher than average if you or a close relative have had colorectal polyps or cancer or if you have inflammatory bowel disease. Speak with your doctor about having earlier or more frequent tests if you think you're at high risk for colorectal cancer.

Screening Saves Lives

If you are 50 or older, getting a screening test for colorectal cancer could save your life.

- Colorectal cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum. A polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there.
- Over time, some polyps can turn into cancer.
- Screening tests find polyps, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early, when the chance of being cured is better.

What are the Symptoms?

People who have polyps or colorectal cancer don't always have symptoms, especially at first. Someone could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it. If there are symptoms, they may include:

- Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement)
- Stomach ache, pains, or cramps that happen a lot and you don't know why
- A change in bowel habits, such as having stools that are narrower than usual
- Losing weight and you don't know why
- Diarrhea, constipation, or feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Constant tiredness
- Nausea or vomiting

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer. However, the only way to know what is causing them is to see your doctor.

Many insurance plans and Every Woman Matters **may** help pay for colorectal cancer screening. Check with your insurance company or Every Woman Matters to find out which tests are covered for you.

Terms you may hear in the doctor's office

Colon:

The large intestines, which absorb water from undigested material and store it until it is expelled from the body as stool.

Colorectal:

Related to the colon and/or rectum.

Gastroenterologist:

A doctor who specializes in disorders of the digestive system.

Polyp:

A growth of tissue. These growths can occur in the rectum and may later become cancerous.

Rectum:

The last eight to ten inches of the large intestine.

Additional Resources

Nebraska Office of Women's Health

www.hhss.ne.gov/crc

National Cancer Institute

www.nci.nih.gov

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

CDC's Colorectal Cancer Campaign

www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife/

For More Information:

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